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ABSTRACT

For some time, military behavioral scientists have attempted to find ways to identify the young person who could successfully complete basic training and become a useful soldier while also detecting those individuals who would not be able to adapt or adjust and might be returned to the civilian world. This paper reports on the investigation of the relationships between preservice biographic and demographic data of military enlistees and their manner of performance and adjustment during the initial phases of military training. These studies indicate that military adjustment and associated problems are directly related to the individuals pre-service adjustment patterns. The implications of this investigation suggests that coping patterns do not change upon enlistment in the Army. Those soldiers with a history of poor adjusting skills became maladjusted soldiers, unable to adapt and successfully survive in the military training environment. There is the possibility that early identification of these individuals could assist commanders and training cadre to understand why they rapidly fail at soldiering also. (Author)

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THE AMERICAN SOLDIER:

THOSE WHO MAKE IT AND THOSE WHO DO NOT

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THE AMERICAN SOLDIER: THOSE WHO MAKE IT AND THOSE WHO DO NOT

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There is an axiom among behavioral scientists that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior. This proposition has been a research topic for military psychologists for several decades. The question becomes one of seeking identifiable behavioral traits or patterns which are predictors of success or maladjustment for young military basic trainees. Military psychologists are constantly attempting to find ways to identify the young person who can successfully complete basic training and become a useful soldier while also detecting those individuals who will not be able to adapt or adjust and must be released and returned to the civilian world. This paper addresses various demographic and biographic variables found in successful and unsuccessful samples on an Army Training Post conducting both Basic Combat Training (8 weeks) and Advanced Individual Training (8 weeks).

INTRODUCTION: The literature is replete with research demonstrating relationships between prior service biographic data of military enlistees and their manner of performance and adjustment during military service. These studies indicate that military adjustment and associated problems are directly related to the individuals' prior service patterns. All branches of the Armed Forces have and are conducting investigations to attempt to identify those young enlistees that might have serious maladjustment difficulties during basic training. These studies are conducted in attempts to develop screening devices or systems which will have the potential of differentiating or discriminating between the successful and unsuccessful military person at the beginning of basic training.

In the early sixties (Datel, 1962), an Army psychologist, experimented with the Socialization Scale of the California Psychological Inventory as a screening instrument to identify those people with a propensity for delinquent/anti-social military behaviors. The Socialization Scale is a self-report, true-false personal survey designed to identify individuals of asocial, delinquent disposition. Datel found that the Scale did in fact identify 33 percent of eventual delinquent soldiers while falsely identifying one percent.

The U.S. Navy has conducted several studies examining relationships between future performance and biographic/demographic data. Gunderson and Arthur (1966) reported that relationships were found between incidence of mental illness of male Naval enlisted personnel and demographic factors such as age, length of service, rank, and occupational specialty. Plag and Goffman (1966) found that three variables--age, level of schooling, and general intelligence--were significantly related to military effectiveness in the Navy. In another study, Arthur (1971) stated that success was predictable. He presented that pre-service variables of age, educational level, intelligence, school and civil disciplinary record, and home stability became predictable effectiveness criteria. He also found that standard psychiatric selection interviews had only minimal predictive validity compared to chance. Naval research with drug abusers (Plag and Goffman, 1973; Nail and Gunderson, 1975) substantiated the above findings.

A study conducted in an Army Airborne Division attempted to create a behavioral profile for predicting "problem" soldiers (Timmerman, 1974). Variables of personality, background, and intelligence were collected and analyzed on both a 'problem soldier' and 'non-problem soldier' sample. The conclusions were that twelve variables of adjustment, background, and

intelligence had a relatively high degree of predictive ability. These variables were able to identify or discriminate the soldier who had disciplinary problems after entering a combat unit.

An Air Force investigation led to the development of a Symptom Checklist (Short and Stankus, 1974), a 50 item paper and pencil questionnaire. This checklist samples a wide variety of symptoms including sleep problems, interpersonal difficulties, and phobias. It was found to be an effective tool for evaluating the emotional stability of basic trainees being considered for sensitive future assignments.

Dr. Wallace Bloom (1976), Director of a special U.S. Air Force evaluation testing program, has developed a screening method for adaptability of the USAF basic trainee to successful service. The initial screening method is a self-report inventory administered within 30 minutes of arrival at the USAF training center. The enlistee responds to a 50 item History, Opinion, and Interest Inventory which discriminates between high risk airmen who might have adjustment problems and airmen with a low risk of adjustment problems. Those airmen identified as potential high-risks are then subjected to further screening and if deemed necessary, further evaluation at the Mental Hygiene Consultation Service.

This brief review presents ample evidence to support the contention that successful service adjustment and performance is predictable. Civilians with a high potential for not being able to adjust in their initial phases of military training may be identified early by examining their prior service backgrounds for evidence of maladaptive behavior patterns.

PROCEDURE: The author was recently assigned to a Mental Hygiene Consultation Service (MHCS) at an Army Training Post. It was noted that most of the services provided related to diagnosing and treating young Army

recruits or recommending them for administrative or medical discharges. Very little was being offered in the way of providing consultation or feedback to the command regarding collective information on the soldier who could not adjust. In an effort to remedy this situation a study of prior service background data was initiated. If a biographic/demographic profile could be generated which would have predictive value; it might prove helpful to commanders in early identification (and subsequent counseling within the unit) of soldiers with a high risk of failing to adjust and successfully complete their military training.

This project, as initially conceived, was to assemble biographic/demographic data on those soldiers that MHCS personnel considered unsuitable for retention and therefore were recommended for expeditious separation. This was an administrative discharge from the Army based on inability to adapt to military training or environment. This group was seen as the unsuccessful soldiers. The successful group was to be those soldiers who were in the last days of basic or advanced training. The same biographic/demographic information was to have been collected using a self-report questionnaire. Analysis of the data of the two groups hopefully would have led to a profile which would discriminate between the successful and unsuccessful groups. Unfortunately the author was transferred prior to the planned completion of this study. The data on the unsuccessful group was collected but not from the successful group. As a means of comparison, though, some of the same data were extracted from another study (Worthington, 1976) the author conducted. The data from the unsuccessful group, by itself, furnished sufficient information to provide commanders with a tentative "prior behavior profile." The data on the unsuccessful soldiers was collected from 75 trainees, seen at MHCS between

May and August 1975, and recommended for immediate discharge from active duty. The data on the successful soldiers was collected in a different study but on the same Post. This sample consisted of 1,489 soldiers, questioned in the next to last week of training, during the months of July through November 1975.

RESULTS: The clinical impression at MHCS was that many, if not most, of the trainees reporting difficulty adjusting to military training also reported family problems, trouble in school, poor interpersonal relations, and spotty work records. These empirical observations led to the development of a questionnaire designed to provide the data necessary to either substantiate or refute this feeling. Table I is a comparison between the successful and unsuccessful groups on some basic variables.

TABLE I

VARIABLE	SUCCESSFUL GROUP	UNSUCCESSFUL GROUP
	N = 1,489	N = 75
Age	19.2 yrs	19.9 yrs
Educational level	11.7 yrs	10.8 yrs
High school graduate or above	83 %	49 %
Employed prior to Army enlistment	60 %	80 %
In school prior to Army enlistment	40 %	<20 %
Marital status		
single	83 %	71 %
married	14 %	19 %
divorced	0.8%	8 %
separated	0.7%	1 %
widowed	0.4%	0 %
remarried	0.4%	5 %

The data in Table I indicates that while not appreciably older, the unsuccessful soldier group has less education, a higher school drop-out rate, fewer single males, and a higher percentage of divorces and multiple marriages. Table II lists why the unsuccessful soldier was referred to MHCS and the counselors' reason for recommending discharge. Figures are presented for the training cycle the soldier was in (Basic Combat Training or Advanced Individual Training) and the total results. While in many cases multiple reasons were presented, the results were adjusted to list a frequency of occurrence ranking.

TABLE II

MAJOR REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO MHCS

COMPLAINT	BCT N=55	AIT N=20	TOTAL N=75
Anxiety/stress	26 %	25 %	26 %
Want out	15 %	19 %	16 %
Family problems	13 %	19 %	15 %
Maladjustment	11 %	16 %	12 %
Somatic complaints	13 %	6 %	11 %
Marital problems	6 %	3 %	5 %
Depression	5 %	3 %	4 %
Inability to relate to others	2 %	3 %	3 %
Training problems	2 %	6 %	3 %
Others	6 %	0 %	4 %
Week of training complaint presented	2.7	2.9	

COUNSELORS REASON FOR DISCHARGE RECOMMENDATION

REASON	BCT N=55	AIT N=20	TOTAL N=75
Immaturity	30 %	30 %	30 %
Maladjustment/anxiety/stress	26 %	13 %	23 %
Character behavior disorder	15 %	23 %	17 %
Depression	13 %	17 %	14 %
Mentally dull	3 %	0 %	3 %
Family	2 %	7 %	3 %
Marital	1 %	7 %	3 %
Phobic reaction	2 %	0 %	2 %
Other	7 %	3 %	6 %

	BCT	AIT	TOTAL
Number of soldiers reporting prior psychiatric problems	11/20%	3/15%	14/19%

Examination of the data in Table II reveals several interesting observations. As the trainees progressed through the training cycles, there appeared to be subtle changes in presenting complaints. Marital problems, depression, and somatic complaints seemed to decrease while family problems, maladjustment, training difficulties, and the desire to get out of the Army increased. A variety of miscellaneous complaints were not presented during AIT. The counselors' reasons for recommending discharges reflected immaturity was a constant factor not differentially effected by length of training. Impaired intellectual functioning and phobic reactions were quickly identified and dealt with. Anxiety and stress was an important disqualifying factor initially but quickly diminished. Character behavior disorders remained hidden longer. Marital problems were seen as more serious by the trainee in the early phases of training but became more legitimate for discharge purposes during the latter stages of training. Perhaps the most intriguing bit of information was the fact that 19% of the trainees indicated a pre-service psychiatric history. The mean complaint time for both BCT and AIT falls at the end of the second week of training. It would seem then, that the first two weeks might be seen as critical in terms of early identification and treatment. Table III presents additional family background information on the unsuccessful soldier group.

TABLE III

FAMILY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNSUCCESSFUL SOLDIERS N=75

SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Parents divorced	26	35 %
Parents separated	5	7 %
Average age of divorce or separation	8.3 yrs	
Father deceased	11	15 %
Mother deceased	4	5 %
Total number of trainees without one or both parents	46	61 %
Number of children in family (to include trainee)	4.7 children	
Position among siblings (N=73)		
oldest	17	23 %
middle	30	41 %
youngest	24	33 %
only child	2	3 %
Number of trainees reporting family history of psychiatric treatment	32	43 %
Age schooling terminated	17.5 yrs (at grade 10.8)	

The information in Table III might be considered the most important. It reveals a significant amount of disruptive family events which, while not tested, would probably exceed normal occurrences in either the total Army enlistee population or that of 19 year old American males as a whole. Almost two thirds (61%) of the unsuccessful group were without one or both parents. They came from fairly large families (with 3.7 siblings each). When they terminated their schooling in the tenth grade, they were chronologically a year behind their classmates. A high incidence (43%) of familial psychiatric treatment was also noted.

DISCUSSION: The results of this study suggest that a relationship existed between adjustment during initial stages of Army training and pre-service adjustment behavior patterns. These findings are not unlike those previously mentioned in the literature reviewed. The Army trainee who was unable to complete Basic or Advanced Training because of an inability to adjust, reported a pre-service background of disruptive personal and family existence.

The educational level of the unsuccessful soldier was lower than that of the successful soldier, yet when his schooling was terminated he was a year older than his classmates. The marital patterns revealed more married, divorced, and remarried men in the unsuccessful soldier group. More of this group (80%) entered the Army from the labor market while 40% of the successful group entered straight from school. Familial information from the unsuccessful group revealed more traumatic upbringing. Almost two thirds of this group had been without one or two parents yet had several (3.7) siblings. Most of the missing parents (42%) were the consequences of divorce or separation which occurred when the trainee was eight years old. A high incidence of family psychiatric problems (43%) was also reported.

Immaturity, maladjustment, anxiety, and stress accounted for 53% of the reasons for discharge recommendations. An examination of their pre-service history does not make it difficult to understand why. The background of both the unsuccessful soldier and his family was highly indicative of very poor adjusting or coping resources. Families failed, marriages broke down, schooling was seen as nonproductive and terminated early; life prior to entrance in the Army was seen as unsuccessful. Life after entrance on active duty was no better; failure occurred again.

SUMMARY: The implications of this investigation indicates that prior service coping patterns do not change upon enlistment in the Army. Those soldiers with a history of poor adjusting skills become maladjusted soldiers, unable to adapt and successfully survive in the military training environment. There is the possibility that early identification of these individuals could assist commanders and training cadre to understand why they rapidly fail at soldiering also.

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